Connecticut Learns — *A School-to-Career System*

What Is It and What's In It for Students and Parents?

It's a combination of career exploration, rigorous school-based learning, work-based learning (from job shadowing to internships) and partnerships between employers and schools.

School-to-career programs help students discover the following information:

- What careers will be available to them in the future;
- What programs, courses, internships and workplace experiences are available to teach them the basic and higher-level skills they will need in order to enter a career ladder;
- What they should know and be able to do in order to succeed in a career; and
- What they might expect regarding wages, hours of work, benefits and employment potential.

All students in school today will work—some right after high school, others after one, two, four or more years of postsecondary education. How well they are prepared for the world of work or for postsecondary education is a critical issue.

School-to-career programs help students make the connection between the classroom and the world of work. They help students and parents understand the relationship between ***learning*** and ***earning***. Students are encouraged to take a more active role in learning about careers, in selecting challenging courses, and in choosing work experiences that will better prepare them for life after high school—whether they choose additional education and training or go right into the work force.

Students involved in school-to-career programs:

- meet rigorous academic standards;
- connect "learning" in school with "earning" in the workplace;
- learn technical knowledge and skills;
- understand how their interests and preferences relate to careers;
- may earn college credits while still in high school; and
- learn workplace skills.

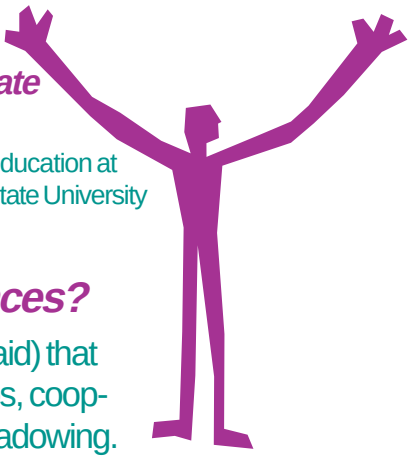
Students Make Informed Career Decisions

Both students and parents need to learn about the skills and knowledge needed for the jobs of the future—the skills and knowledge needed to get students where they want to go. The majority of jobs with career ladders will require education and training beyond high school, but not necessarily a four-year college degree. Often students and their parents don't know what these jobs are, where they are located and the skills they will require.

School-to-career programs emphasize career exploration and guidance to help students discover career options and select courses for a smoother and more productive transition from high school.

Students who go to college without adequate occupational focus are less likely to graduate and even less likely to end up with commensurate employment if they do graduate.

Kenneth Gray, professor of education at
Pennsylvania State University



What Are Work-Based Learning Experiences?

Work-based learning is work experience (paid and unpaid) that takes place in the workplace. It includes apprenticeships, cooperative learning, service learning, internships and job shadowing. Work-based learning allows students to develop specific career skills and knowledge. It also helps students to see how classroom learning relates to work.

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act requires workplace mentors for all students involved in work-based learning. A mentor is an employee who helps a student acquire the skills, knowledge and work habits that lead to a successful career.

> ***Over the past several years, a number of studies have shown that mentoring relationships are linked to improved grades, lower dropout rates and higher enrollment in college.***
>
> National School-to-Work Office

School to Career Programs Do Not Preclude College!

School-to-Career programs encourage students to choose a broad career pathway, or cluster, that relates to their aptitudes and interests. This career cluster delivers core academics in a career context and provides work-based experiences. There is a broad range of career possibilities within each cluster. As students progress, they and their parents learn of career options available to them and the education that is required for each option. For example, a student who performs well in the Health and Biosciences Cluster may choose to pursue a two-year degree in nursing or laboratory technology or may decide to pursue a medical degree.

Career Clusters

The school-to-career system is organized around eight industry-developed career clusters (representing all jobs in the Connecticut economy). Students in school-to-career programs will select one or more of the following clusters to explore by the end of 10th grade.

Arts and Media
Business and Finance
Construction: Technologies and Design
Environmental, Natural Resources and Agriculture
Government, Education and Human Services
Health and Biosciences
Retail, Tourism, Recreation and Entrepreneurship
Technologies: Manufacturing, Communications and Repair

Arts and Media

This career cluster includes jobs performing in theater, dance and music, and behind-the-scenes jobs such as set design, set lighting and camera work. It includes the visual arts, such as painting and sculpture, and the management of theaters, museums, art galleries and concert spaces, both classical and popular. Also in this cluster are jobs in radio, television, films, newspapers and magazines (for example, announcing, acting, filming, producing, writing, editing and reporting). Advertising is part of this cluster, as are jobs in commercial art, design and photography.

Examples of job possibilities

Musician,Actor, Camera Operator, Writer, Graphic Designer, Multimedia Developer

Business and Finance

There are still many jobs in "offices" in Connecticut, despite the fact that banks and insurance companies are restructuring the way they use their work forces. There are jobs for graduates with accounting backgrounds, for employees who can manage both people and money, and for others who can make business decisions on developing and selling products and services.All offices depend upon well-trained administrative support staff people, who need to know how to use computers, fax machines and other business and office equipment.

Examples of job possibilities

AdministrativeAssistant, Tax Technician, Computer Technician, SystemsAnalyst, Executive, Sales Manager, Financial Manager, Securities Broker, Underwriter

Construction: Technologies and Design

The design and construction of homes, buildings, bridges and roads is a major category of jobs in the Connecticut economy. Some knowledge of the whole industry is a cornerstone for people who are interested in a range of different jobs — buying and developing land, designing or building projects, and so on.

Examples of job possibilities

Auto Mechanic, Facility Manager, Industrial Designer, Risk and Hazard Evaluator

Environmental, Natural Resources and Agriculture

This cluster includes jobs in which workers improve the indoor and outdoor environment, reduce waste and byproducts, manage forests and land, produce food from the land and sea, and nurture animals. Workers with the skills to monitor air, water and land quality and control environmental risks are in demand.

Examples of job possibilities

Hazmat Cleanup and Response Technician, Instrumental/Optical LabAnalyst, Food Scientist and Nutritionist, Pollution Control Engineer, Recycling and Recovery Specialist

Government, Education and Human Services

This cluster includes teachers at any level, educational administrators, political officeholders, government service workers, social workers, psychologists, librarians, public safety workers (police and fire) and legal professionals.

Examples of job possibilities

Child Services Worker, Parent Educator, Disability Specialist, Firefighter, Employment and Training Counselor, Urban/Regional Planner, Parole and Probation Officer

Health and Biosciences

The Health and Biosciences cluster embraces careers in a wide range of healthcare settings, such as hospitals, medical laboratories, and medical and dental practices. It also includes industries involved in researching and manufacturing drugs and other medical products, including those in the fast-changing biotechnology/biomedical field.

Examples of job possibilities

Physical Therapy Assistant, Biomedical Equipment Technician, Home Health Care Worker, Laboratory Technician/Technologist, Pharmacist, Speech Pathologist

Retail, Tourism, Recreation and Entrepreneurship

Many young people get their first jobs in retail stores, restaurants, hotels and motels, tourist attractions and recreational facilities — often earning minimum wage. The opportunity to earn better salaries with benefits, and to build a career, usually requires getting into management and operations positions. Some retail companies have management training programs that will accept high school graduates, but college programs in marketing and business are a more expedient route. Many "fast food" companies have management training programs, while rising to become a chef in one of the state's many restaurants usually requires being trained in a culinary institute.

Examples of job possibilities

Customer Service Representative, Travel Agent, Chef, Small Business Owner, Restaurant and Food Service Manager, Casino Manager, Cyberspace Specialist

Technologies: Manufacturing, Communications and Repair

This cluster represents a broad range of industries that need employees with a technical background. Included are technical jobs in manufacturing, the electric utilities, and the telephone and cable companies. This cluster also includes jobs in companies that repair automobiles, airplanes, computers and other technical products, as well as companies that develop computer software.

Examples of job possibilities

Machinist, Tool and Die Maker, CAD Technician, Research and Design Engineer

Upon successful completion of STC programs, students:

- are prepared to enter education and training beyond the high school level or for an entry-level job along a career path;
- have a career portfolio to present to prospective employers or schools; and
- receive the *Connecticut Career Certificate*— a certificate that shows the skills they have mastered in one of the eight career clusters.

Grade/ Program Level	CT Learns STC Program	Credential
Four-Year College/ Training Program	School-Based Learning	Baccalaureate Degree/ Connecticut Career Certificate of Advanced Mastery
Two-Year College/ Training Program	Work-based Learning	Associate Degree/ Connecticut Career Certificate of Advanced Mastery
Grades 10-12	Connecting Activities	High School Diploma/ Connecticut Career Certificate of Initial Mastery
Grades K-10		

Why Do We Need School-to-Career Programs?

These are the facts

Seventy-five percent (75%) of students entering high school today will not go on to complete the requirements of a four-year college degree.

The Center for Learning and Competitiveness

At best, only about half of those who enroll in a four-year college program have graduated six years later.

Some estimate the figure to be as low as 30 percent. The American College Testing Service (ACT) reports that the college dropout rate hit an all-time high in 1996 — 27 percent of freshman dropped out that year. Just 53 percent managed to graduate in five years. Nor is the news good for parents who hope their children will transfer into four-year colleges from a community college. Only 12 percent of these students are found at four-year colleges three years later.

According to Kenneth Gray, a professor of education at Pennsylvania State University, only a third of all students graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college.

According to the Bureau of the Census, the percentage of 25- to 29- year old high school graduates completing 4 or more years of college was 29.7 percent in 1994.

Currently, one out of every three students who graduate with a bachelor's degree fails to find a job in their field of study. Only one in two who graduate with a professional credential — such as teaching, engineering, accounting or the biological sciences — will find commensurate employment.

There are not enough jobs to satisfy the professional goals of all college graduates. While our nation's colleges graduate more than a million students with professional degrees each year, the economy only generates 600,000 jobs.

By the year 2000, 25 percent of college graduates will be employed in jobs that do not currently require a college education.

Connecticut Department of Labor, Office of Research and Information

Technical employment is the fastest-growing segment of the labor market.

Professional occupations make up only 20 percent of all jobs. Technical jobs not only pay well but are more plentiful than professional jobs. Graduates of two-year college programs in high-demand occupations—such as certified welders, dental hygienists, chefs and machine technicians—usually find high-paying jobs quickly. Graduates of four-year colleges who lacked a career focus in school find themselves working in low-skill, low-wage jobs while they search in vain for an opening in the field for which they studied. Labor market advantage for high-skill, high-wage jobs comes from education that is focused on a career goal not from education for the sake of a degree.

What Can You Do?

If you are a student:

Learn about school-to-career activities available to you through your school — career counseling and exploration, internships, job shadowing. Decide to take advantage of an opportunity this year!

Take responsibility for your own career exploration. Make a plan for exploring careers, choosing appropriate classes, creating opportunities to try out your interests and being exposed to what a career entails.

If you are a parent:

Be a mentor to your children. Encourage them to find out about and participate in school-to-career activities. Guide them in career exploration, lining up "take a student to work" activities, helping them choose extra curricular activities that support their interests.

Offer to volunteer at the school's career center. You may be able to help students with computerized career exploration, choose possible career areas to explore further, or find job shadow or work experience placements.

Be an advocate for school-to-career in your community — over the backyard fence, at the grocery store, on the soccer field. Become a resource for other parents and encourage them to become involved. Attend school board and PTA meetings, promote school-to-career activities and encourage others to become involved.